

postmod gestures

aesthetics and lifestyle in late capitalism

Chuck Kleinhans, draft version October 1986

American Pop art was the first high culture gallery art to successfully negotiate the postmod situation. While assuming an amused irony, it appropriated the techniques of commercial illustration and gave them the aura of art, the original. Pop mixed the style of sign painting and the realism of the object displayed. In films such as Bruce Conner's **Report** and Kenneth Anger's **Scorpio Rising** it expanded the art of satiric montage. And it created the first space for the hybrid styles which mark the present era.

postmodern. 1. referring to the contemporary situation of art, assuming that we are somehow past a tradition or period of the modern in the various arts. Since the different arts and individuals define modernism and its period differently, understandings of postmodernism vary considerably (a movement? a structural situation? a set of style options? a gesture to the masses in working with mass culture? another critical fiction?)

postmodern, 2. the condition of being after modernism. This assumes that the term modernism is understood and agreed upon, and that we are now past it (because old modernists are dying off at a rapid pace? that there are only a few left: were you surprized when Henry Moore (or other recent artist death) died because you hadn't really thought he was still alive? he was part of an past5, art historical context, not a present art practice context.

Some general and non exclusive characteristics of postmodernism:

The acceptance of a variety of styles in the same spacio-temporal environment as well as within a particular work. Contrast this with modernist concern with uniformity and coordination of major and minor arts (and the very acceptance of the major/minor distinction). E.g., the Bauhaus mottoes and goals of less is more, form follows function, are concerned with understatement in contrast to a Victorian and Beidermeyer style of extreme ornamentation and decoration. The Bauhaus integrates architecture and interior design, pottery and ceramics, table settings and designer fashions. In this it is a 20th century elaboration of some of the goals of William Morris in validating craft, elevating it with respect to the high arts. Morris is a challenge to the Kantian distinction of art and craft and to the Kantian hypothesis of the aesthetic experience.